

The adaptive side of psychopathy

Citation for published version (APA):

Durand, G. (2019). *The adaptive side of psychopathy: Investigating adaptive characteristics associated with the psychopathic personality*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20190905gd>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2019

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20190905gd](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20190905gd)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
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Valorization Addendum

This dissertation focused on the relationship between adaptive personality traits and the psychopathic personality. More specifically, we investigated how a broad range of adaptive traits were associated with different subtypes of the psychopathic personality. Furthermore, we explored the relationship between adaptive traits and cognitive abilities. Lastly, we examined the validity of the Durand Adaptive Psychopathic Traits Questionnaire (DAPTQ) as an appropriate tool to measure adaptive psychopathic traits. Through this dissertation, we aimed at exploring the potential positive aspects associated with (components of) psychopathy. We also hope that this dissertation provides more insights into the evaluation of adaptive traits in psychopathic individuals. This valorization addendum focusses on the following subjects: relevance to research, target group benefiting from the knowledge of this dissertation, possible products and activities that can be realized subsequent to this dissertation, innovation, and implementation of the findings.

Relevance

A significant portion of the published research in the field of psychopathy focuses solely on the maladaptive aspects of psychopathy, most often referred to as a personality disorder (Berg et al., 2013). The association between psychopathy and maladaptive personality can be partially attributed to the significant proportion of studies performed on inmates (Camp, Skeem, Barchard, Lilienfeld, & Poythress, 2013; Kiehl & Hoffman, 2011). The stigma that psychopathy is completely maladaptive may explain the fear of psychopaths within the general population (Edens, Colwell, Desforjes, & Fernandez, 2005; Edens, Marcus, Lilienfeld, & Poythress, 2006).

The belief that psychopathy is exclusively maladaptive has important repercussions on some individuals. In legal settings, the label of "psychopathy" is associated with harsher sentences, lower perception of treatment amenability, and perceived dangerousness (Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019). In countries using the death sentence, such as the United States, inmates labeled as psychopaths can face disproportionate and inappropriate use of capital punishment (Cox, Clark, Edens, Smith, & Magyar, 2013). This perception is in line with the results of Feldman and Crandall (2007), who reported that public perception of personal responsibility for mental illness, dangerousness of mental illness, and rarity of mental illness were all associated with stigmatization. Psychopathy meets all of these latter criteria, with surveys of the general public suggesting that people believe that psychopaths are responsible for their behaviors, are dangerous to the public, and make up less than 1% of the population (Smith, Edens, Clark, & Rulseh, 2014; Wayland & O'Brien, 2013).

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In order to shed more light on the presumed positive sides associated with psychopathic traits, it is important to determine how adaptive psychopathic traits can be reliably measured. The first part of this dissertation examined a wide range of adaptive traits that have shown potential association with a subset of psychopathic traits. Based on this knowledge, the second part of this dissertation focused on the development and the validation of an instrument to effectively measure adaptive traits in the field of psychopathic traits in the general population. After a series of revision, the final version of the DAPTQ showed incremental validity over other measures including a factor assessing adaptive traits (e.g. Fearless Dominance and Boldness). This dissertation hence contributes to a better understanding of the methods used to assess adaptive traits in the field of psychopathy. In the future, this knowledge could be relevant for the identification of individuals with high levels of adaptive psychopathic traits and low levels of maladaptive psychopathic traits, which would be an asset when recruiting individuals, such as military personnel, paramedics, and police officers, for employment in high-stress environments.

Target group

The findings of this dissertation are relevant to several target groups. The first target group includes researchers in the field of personality. This dissertation proposes an instrument to be used in conjunction with current instruments in the field of psychopathic traits to obtain a better profile of one's adaptive traits. Also, this dissertation gives them more insights on the benefits of reporting analyses by subtypes of psychopathic traits, as multiple personality traits can be positively or negatively associated with psychopathic traits depending on which traits they are compared to. Second, this dissertation could also be of interest to human resources managers. Numerous professions, such as police officers and military personnel, experience exceptionally high levels of mental disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder and anxiety (Pearson, Zamorski, & Janz, 2014; Shields, 2018). By offering tools to human resources that would allow a better selection of individuals with a predisposition to stress resiliency, it might be possible to reduce mental health issues derived from non-resilient individuals in high stress environments (but perhaps with ethical concerns; see Bassil, Rutten, and Horstkötter (2019) for a list of potential issues). Third, the knowledge of adaptive psychopathic traits is valuable for the society, as it might reduce the stigma surrounding individuals classified as psychopathic who exhibits significantly more adaptive traits than maladaptive ones.

Activities/ products

The present dissertation reported the development and validation of the DAPTQ. The results showed that this questionnaire can reliably be used in the general adult population. The DAPTQ showed incremental validity over other instruments measuring psychopathic traits including an adaptive component over a wide range of personality constructs. The DAPTQ cannot be used to measure psychopathy or psychopathic traits but can be used in conjunction with other instruments assessing psychopathic traits to obtain deeper insights on an individual's adaptivity.

The knowledge derived from the development of the DAPTQ could be used as a steppingstone to develop an instrument taking into account a wider range of biological, physiological, and psychological factors. This dissertation highlighted the association between single nucleotide polymorphisms' (SNPs) variations, stress resilience, and cognitive abilities, as well as the association between the DAPTQ and cognitive abilities. Developing a test battery considering one's physiological reactions and cognitive abilities during a stress task, as well as their genetic variation from selected SNPs, all compared with results from the DAPTQ would allow researchers to obtain a better profile of an individual's resilience to stress and overall adaptive personality.

Innovation

The studies conducted in this dissertation are innovative on several points. For instance, the study described in Chapter 2 re-examined the conclusion of Love and Holder (2014) regarding the association between unhappiness and psychopathy. By using analyses by subtypes of psychopathic traits, we concluded that only a subset of psychopathic traits is associated with unhappiness, while another subset is associated with happiness. Similar findings were observed in Chapter 3 between psychopathic traits and fear of pain.

Chapter 6 was particularly innovative due to its exploratory nature. Although the results are warrant to replication in future studies, our findings suggest that multiple genes and hormones, such as FKBP5, COMT, Val66Met, SNAP-25, DAT1, and cortisol may play a role in cognitive abilities under stress.

In Chapter 7, we introduced an innovative instrument to measure adaptive traits in the field of psychopathy, namely the DAPTQ. To our knowledge, the DAPTQ is the first instrument to expand on the adaptive factors of existing instruments measuring psychopathic traits. Indeed, while the Psychopathic Personality Inventory and the Triarchic Psychopathy Measure include one to three adaptive factors, the DAPTQ includes eight

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factors that have shown an association with the psychopathic personality. This wider range of factors should provide stronger predictive abilities when examining constructs associated with successful psychopathic individuals.

In Chapter 9, we validated a French translation of the DAPTQ. Translating instruments in the field of psychopathy will allow researchers to study non-English speaking populations, hence obtaining a better portrait of the general population's adaptive traits.

Schedule and implementation

The inclusion of adaptive traits as a core component of psychopathy is highly debated. While the current dissertation focused on the general population, it is worthwhile to explore potential methods to identify psychopaths with adaptive traits out of the larger group of diagnosed psychopaths.

This dissertation gives insight to the role of adaptive traits in highly psychopathic individuals from the general community. However, since the results were always examined in terms of correlations between variables, it is still unknown how the DAPTQ could be used to identify successful psychopaths. Future studies should, therefore, examine potential cut-off scores for the DAPTQ, as well as potential cut-off scores by interaction with other instruments of psychopathic traits.

The findings of the studies in this dissertation have, and will be, shared with the scientific community through scientific publications in international journals.

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